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THE PERSONAL LIBERTY BILL.

AN

A D D R E S S

TO THE

L E G I S L A T U R E

AND

PEOPLE OF NEW YORK.

BY

A. D. M A Y O.

A L B A N Y :

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ADDRESS.

A bill is now pending in the Legislature of New York which provides for the protection of personal liberty in this commonwealth; it has been framed in response to numerous petitions from the people, and a deep and widely spread feeling against the operations of the Fugitive Slave Law of the United States. As a citizen of this State I ask the attention of its legislators and people to some considerations in favor of the enactment of a law for the protection of freedom in New York.

The petitioners, whose prayers our Legislature is urged to consider, are not concerned about an imaginary grievance; neither do I plead for any visionary theory, or excite indignation against any fancied evil. We ask the protection of the greatest Republican State in the world in behalf of her 45,000 colored citizens, whose liberty is imperiled by an unjust and despotic law of the United States; of 3,400,000 white citizens, who, by the same law, are reduced to the alternative of becoming kidnappers of human beings or criminals before the statute; of the cause of human freedom, which is outraged and abolished in New York by the existence of the Fugitive Slave Law of September 18th, 1850.

This law is too well known to require a minute analysis; but nobody who has attentively studied its provisions will accuse me of exaggeration when I say that here is a law under which any colored citizen of the State of New York may be arrested and tried before a court of one man on the charge of being a slave, his own testimony refused in the case, the testimony of his persecutor admitted, and, unless he can prove to the satisfaction of this one man that he is free, he may be sent to perpetual slavery; the whole power of our national and state governments being used, if necessary, to consummate the crime. Under such a law no colored person is safe in the

State of New York. All the safeguards which this commonwealth throws around her citizens are rudely trampled under foot in the case of 45,000 people, who have committed no crime against the State. This entire portion of our population is subject to the persecution, insult and indignity of a trial for personal liberty ; that personal liberty hanging on the will of one man, chosen, as such official always is, from his known willingness to execute this infamous statute "with alacrity."

Such is the exposed condition of our entire free colored population ; and any one of the 9,000 colored voters of this State—yea, the man whose vote in a contested election has chosen your governor, may at any time be compelled to prove his freedom before any man who can get himself appointed United States Commissioner, on the charge of any man brazen enough to come to this commonwealth claiming one of her citizens as his property !

By this law the State of New York and all her citizens are forbidden to harbor or assist any person flying from slavery to freedom. Any such person may be arrested on her soil, outraged or murdered in the arrest ; if secured, hurried before a Commissioner of the United States, and, on the testimony or affidavit of one claiming to be his master, sent into perpetual bondage.

Under this law every citizen of New York is forbidden to perform the common offices of humanity : feeding the hungry, curing the sick, succoring the innocent, if the object be the one most loudly appealing to every benevolent heart for such aid — a man, woman or child fleeing from a bondage that converts a human being into a chattel — on penalty of a fine of \$1,000 and six months' imprisonment, with liability to pay the alleged worth of the chattel if lost. This is a provision which presents, to every citizen of our State, the monstrous alternative of becoming an abettor and aider of slave-catchers, or a criminal exposed to the indignity of the prisoner's cell.

Now, I am not a statesman — not even a politician ; but, unless I am destitute of the common perceptions of morality, and the common feelings of humanity, I am competent to pronounce this Fugitive Slave Law an insult to the dignity of this sovereign State ; a conspiracy against the peace of her unoffending citizens ; a law that violates every principle of natural and revealed religion ; a law which degrades every man who obeys it ; which dishonors the commonwealth that tolerates

it; a law framed expressly to insult and override every cherished and sacred principle that makes New York a free, Christian State. I ask your attention to the moral aspects of this statute, as shown in its practical application. I desire you will see that this is a wicked law, which carries destruction, anarchy and sin wherever it is enforced. And if proven to be such a law I suppose there will be no question that it is not binding on this sovereign State or any of her citizens, and that it is the duty of our Legislature to throw around the people a safeguard against its iniquitous operation. For I am sure I address those who acknowledge that no legislation can elevate that which is essentially inhuman and wicked into a thing proper for good men to do or even to wink at. I acknowledge that if I were an unbeliever in the existence of God, or a law of eternal justice, to which all human enactments must conform, I should have no basis for such an appeal as I propose to make. I am willing to give the friends of the Fugitive Slave Law all the advantage they may gain from the fact that I argue this question as a Christian to the Citizens of a Christian State, on the everlasting premises of Christian Morality. I shall not descend from this impregnable position to conciliate or hold controversy with the enemies of liberty on any lower ground, but show what an outrage on Humanity and a Christian Civilization this statute is, and then ask you to do your duty as guardians of liberty in the commonwealth.

First. Consider the indignity cast upon the entire free colored population of New York by this law. There are 45,000 free colored persons in this State; on 9,000 of these persons the State has conferred the highest privilege of the freeman, the right of suffrage. Now read the Fugitive Slave Law carefully, and tell me what protection the State affords those citizens against the claim of any slaveholder? Remember this law is operative in respect to slaves, who may have escaped at any time previous to its enactment. It also claims the posterity of any female slave who may have escaped at any period, though that woman may be the daughter of the most chivalrous Senator in Congress; as white as any woman in New York, and the wife of any man in your State; this law claims her posterity as slaves. If the slaveholder comes or empowers his agent to come to this State, and in the regular mode testifies before a United States Commissioner that any colored citizen is his property; that he escaped from his service at any previous day; that his mother or grandmother escaped from service; what protection is given to the victim of this persecution? His own mouth is shut in his own defense by the

law. The State cannot take him out of the hands of the United States Marshal on any pretense; the claim may be so made as to render it next to impossible for the captive to produce testimony; the examination is to be made summary and may be made in secret; the one commissioner is chosen for his willingness to enforce the law, is open to all corrupting influences from the prosecutor; and as if this were not enough, the American Union steps in and sets the example of bribery by offering him a fee of ten dollars if the negro is sent into slavery and only five dollars if he is declared a freeman. If under such a pressure this Commissioner declares any colored citizen in New York a slave, though he were the richest, wealthiest, most honored man of his class, there is no remedy in New York. The only remedy is, an appeal to the courts of a slave state, and a long process in which a free commonwealth is beheld pleading the cause of her free citizen before a power that has subjugated him and his posterity to the doom of perpetual oppression.

Do not say this hazard is imaginary. It is real. Again and again have free colored persons been persecuted under this statute in Free States; it is one of the most common features of the enforcement of the law. Again and again have Commissioners sent away free colored people as slaves. We have not yet forgotten that Commissioner Ingraham sent Adam Gibson into slavery, in most indecent haste, and Mr. Knight, of Maryland, refused to accept him as his slave. Other cases have occurred where witnesses have sworn to falsehood, and the Commissioner decided, in the face of justice, a free man a slave. We have only to read the history of the cases under this law to learn how many such attempts have been made; how often they have succeeded; how a few victims have been rescued by great effort. But who can tell how many free men and women have been spirited away in secret by the facilities afforded through this infamous edict of despotism. The Fugitive Slave Law is really a law to encourage kidnapping; for it leaves the whole free colored population without defense against that power which proclaims the black man the natural slave of the white man.

Is it said that there still exists a power by which any abuse of this kind can be rectified? that, after a free man is dragged into slavery, the appeal may be made for his liberty before the courts of the Slave State into which he has been carried? But do those who make this plea reflect on the degradation thus brought on the Empire State? We charge that 45,000

free citizens and 9,000 voters, whom New York is as truly bound to protect as her Seward, her Fillmores, her Dickin-
sons, are daily exposed to the indignity of being caused to prove they are men before a court of one man, and deprived of all voice in this awful trial; that this one obscure official may declare the victim no man, but a chattel, and the State has no redress on her own soil; and we are comforted by the assurance that the State can go chasing this person from the coast of Maryland to the mountain passes of Arizona, and if he can be found in any portion of the two and a half million square miles of Slave States or Territories, a suit may be instituted for his freedom! Suppose there were a law of the United States by which our Livingstons, and Clintons, and Van Burens could be thus dragged, at any moment, before a Commissioner and tried on the charge of being a chattel, their own mouth shut in the case, and their liberty suspended on the whim of such men as slave-catching Commissioners have often proved to be; would not the lawyer who should tell us we could seek our abducted citizen anywhere over two and a half million square miles of territory, and institute a suit to prove Mr. Seward or Mr. Van Buren a man, be mobbed on any platform? And who is the advocate so shameless as to assert that the State of New York is bound to throw a protection around her noblest white man which she denies to the humblest colored voter—the poorest child of the black mother born on her soil? I have been accustomed to think that the government of New York was instituted *especially* for the protection of the weak. I have supposed that a State that could protect a Seward, a Fillmore, a Dickinson, and leave the colored man unprotected because he was of a despised class, would be a Despotism and not a Republic. It is accounted the deepest disgrace in society for a gentleman to insult his inferior in position who can have no means of redress; but what shall we say of a State that elevates 9,000 men, of an oppressed class, to the high privilege of suffrage and then insults them by saying: "I have no protection to offer you against any miscreant who is willing to perjure himself before another miscreant; yea, am ready to stand by and see you dragged away into the hell of oppression, lending my whole power to the atrocious act." This is now the position of the Empire State. Two years ago the Legislature voted to amend the Constitution in a manner that would admit the colored man to the right of suffrage on the same basis as the white man. But should the State do

this justice, would it not be forced to say: "*I make you a voter but I can't protect you against the kidnapper; you may be a citizen of New York, but you may be carried off to the slave pen in chains and I cannot prevent the process!*" Away with our pretense to freedom while this great commonwealth is compelled to hold her breath and stand mute as an idiot whenever the crack of the slave whip is heard on her soil!

If this law is so iniquitous in its operation against the free colored citizens of the State, what shall we say of the fleeing bondmen whom it pursues over our hills and valleys? If there is any point of practical morality on which all good men in civilized lands are agreed, it is the right of the oppressed to fly from his oppression. I suppose no man could be found so opposed to the right of self defense as to deny to the subject of American Slavery the poor resort of running away. The most thrilling episodes in the world's history have been the adventures of innocent men escaping from their oppressors. Whatever theory we hold about those unable or unwilling to throw off the yoke, it is infamous to say that a man who has forced his way out of such a bondage as prevails in our Southern States and has come as far as New York, guided by the North Star and the irrepressible longing for liberty, is not entitled to his freedom. And to succor the oppressed, fleeing from his bonds, has always been held the most sacred duty as the noblest privilege of mankind.

We see no difficulty in the application of this principle to the case of white emigrants flying from political punishment abroad to our shores. Numbers of young Germans have fled from home to escape service legally due in the armies of the German governments; we receive them and make them citizens; and President, Congress and People would breathe out war at the bare suggestion of an application from the despotism they left for their rendition to military service. We receive men escaped from the political prisons where tyrants bury the patriots of Europe, and defend them with the whole power of the Republic. We received John Mitchell, a fugitive from service in Botany Bay, and would have made a freeman of him, had he not insisted on making himself a servant of the worst tyranny on God's earth. From every land on the face of the globe come flocking hither the flying fugitives from oppression; and we glory in accepting them, and lifting them to companionship with ourselves in all the privileges of the Republic. The President of the United

States holds his seat by the votes of fugitives from abroad. But what claim have these men on our sympathies and justice which the American fugitive from American despotism has not? Is the bondage from which the black man has fled easier to bear than the discipline of the camp, the prison or the penal colony? Has the slaveholder any title to the service of his subject which the Emperor of Austria has not? Does the fugitive Irishman love liberty more than the fugitive Negro? Show me any particular in which the claim of the fugitive slave is not superior to the claim of any emigrant that seeks these shores. He is an American; born, reared in America; the State has been enriched by his unrequited toil; he is not necessarily a savage, but may be intelligent and a Christian; yea, may be as white as half the inhabitants of the Republic and more worthy protection than thousands of voters in the elections of the State.

And surely if sufferings endured and heroism displayed in pursuit of liberty be any claim on our humanity, his right is pre-eminent above all other men. Within the last year, a woman was brought within sight of our Capitol, who had escaped from slavery nailed in a box, escaped through tortures and privations almost beyond human endurance; she came into our capital city bruised, maimed, crushed almost to a pulp, in her dreadful prison; thank God there were found citizens better than the State, who saw that her face was set towards the North Star! Again and again do we behold men, women, little children, who have wandered like wild beasts for months, been hunted with dogs and guns, shot, bruised, starved, frozen, perhaps carried on the shoulders of their companions through the storms of winter, encountering for liberty what no white citizen of New York ever endured. Indeed I wait to see the white man who can show so well earned a title to freedom as any such man who has reached our soil on his journey due north; as I have listened to the narratives of these men and women, and heard of their perils and achievements, I have said that heroism has fled from the white race and lodged with them, as if to mock our vain-glorious pretensions of superiority. Everybody knows that there is more courage, tact, persistence and wisdom displayed by these heroes in flying from the shadow of the American flag than is shown by us in upholding its proud folds. Are we then sunk so low in New York that a courage almost miraculous and heroism past imitation shall not claim our protection? Must we say that as soon as an American becomes a martyr for liberty, we shall make him a

slave ? Must we sit in our rocking chairs in our warm houses, and must our legislators wrangle over trivial affairs in our Capitol, and shall our courts drone on the bench, while the soil of New York is tramped from Manhattan to Niagara with the blood of men flying towards liberty, and every month sees a score of fugitives skulking away from the capital of a Republic to claim the protection of a Queen?

Are we told there is no help for this—that we *must* see those whose bravery and sufferings, recounted by the historian and novelist, have set the world's heart beating with sympathy, hunted over our soil like stray cattle ? Let us not confess to this degrading necessity till we have searched through every nook and corner in the great magazine of Constitutional Liberty to draw forth the instrument to abolish this scandal to the human race. Every step in the emancipation of man has been met by the plea: *There is no law for it ; you can't do it.* But a way has been found out of every oppression in which man has groaned, and New York can find a way out of her present guilty complicity with this crime against human nature. Let the people command every Legislature to find such a way ; sacrifice every public man that can't find such a way ; proclaim that whoever would occupy a post of honor in this State shall find the way out of this conspiracy against these fugitive martyrs and heroes of the age ; and, depend on it, our servants will find that way—find it as easily as they now grope in a legal labyrinth, unable to discern any precedent for protecting man, in his last extremity, against the worst oppression that now insults Christendom.

But it is not alone for its injustice and inhumanity towards the negro that I hold up this law to the indignation of the people. The insult it offers to the white citizens of our State moves my whole soul to its opposition. The negro slaves of America are now an inferior race ; and wicked as it is to add another drop to their cup of bitterness, we have learned to bear this with comparative resignation. But when this slave power insolently confronts that white race which has risen into comparative elevation ; when it comes into New York and demands that you and I shall turn our backs on the glorious hopes of a coming civilization, and accept the alternative of losing our humanity by aiding to enforce this infamous law, or save our humanity on penalty of a criminal offense, the outrage becomes insupportable. To drag back a man who has always been a slave to his old bondage, is as much as an ordinary mortal can endure ; to compel a cultivated, Christian

man or woman of New York to become a brute or a traitor, is more than a saint can tolerate without indignation.

Have you well contemplated the provisions of this statute concerning white men? Section 5th provides that the United States Commissioners may have power to "*call to their aid the bystanders, or posse commitatus of the proper county, when necessary to insure a faithful observance of the clause of the Constitution referred to, in conformity with the provisions of this act; and all good citizens are hereby commanded to aid and assist in the prompt and efficient execution of this law whenever their services may be required, as aforesaid, for that purpose.*" That clause makes a slave-catcher of every white citizen of the United States. It makes slave-catching a test of good citizenship. But I may be told this is an imaginary danger. I reply: every white man and woman in New York is insulted by the supposition that, under any combination of circumstances, they could be called to commit such a degradation as catching a slave. Has it come to this, that no citizen of New York can rise above this disgusting liability of being a Marshal's assistant in getting between a fugitive and the North Star?

But this is only the beginning of our liability. The framers of this statute understood that the cultivated, refined citizens of our State would not often be called directly to catch the slave; they would only be expected to acquiesce at home or declaim in conventions about the salvation of our Union, while the grog-shops could be relied on to furnish a Marshal's posse. But it was anticipated that often these good people would be called to aid the flying fugitive. Some poor man might skulk in at the merchant's counting room and implore him, for God's sake, to give a morsel of food or an old garment. Some benevolent clergyman might be awakened at night by the summons to relieve a girl flying from a life of shame worse than death. Any woman, however elevated her position, might find her favorite maid a fugitive from the New Orleans market. The Judge might come home to see his wife binding up a woman's wounds gained in a week's hiding in a vessel, stowed away like a dead dog. So this class is amply provided for. And section 7th of the law provides that any person who shall *obstruct, hinder or prevent* the arrest of such fugitive, or shall attempt to rescue such fugitive, or shall aid, abet or assist such person to escape from his pursuers, or "shall harbor or conceal such fugitive, so as to prevent the discovery or arrest, shall be subjected to a fine not ex-

ceeding \$1,000 and imprisonment not exceeding six months;" besides being liable to the owner of the slave for \$1,000 for each fugitive so lost. Rather expensive do our masters make obedience to Christ's golden rule in the world's greatest Republican State! This provision covers every form of assistance to the flying fugitive. Every man or woman in New York who offers a loaf of bread—a night's sleep—a God speed, to a self-emancipated bondman, is a criminal deserving fine and imprisonment. So here is the alternative to which we are all driven: we must be prepared to aid in catching the slave at the bidding of any drunken man-stealer; must refuse every office of our common humanity to any suppliant we know to be a fugitive, and thereby sink ourselves to the lowest service of despotism; or we must become criminals to our country's laws—subject to the disgrace appointed only for the villains and ruffians of the police court.

Perhaps we do not yet fully understand what this slave catching means; we may think it would be a somewhat dignified performance to meet a black man flying from the Paradise of the Patriarchal Institution, and implore him to turn and go back to the arms of his afflicted master, and beg to be punished for his contumacy in running away from the missionary institution appointed by Providence, where "in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings," the Ethiopian disciple could learn the apostolical way of getting to heaven. But, unfortunately, these runaways have a different theory about this matter, and whenever they are not surprised and secured instantly, insist on defending themselves with all the means Providence affords them. So it has come to pass that slave catching in America means: in Buffalo, knocking a man into a hot stove; in Pennsylvania, murdering a white man who went to Maryland to procure the release of the free woman, Rachel Parker, and shooting dead Wm. Smith, a fugitive attempting to escape; in Downington, seizing a girl and putting a plaster over her mouth; in Bedford, wounding one man mortally and one dangerously, while five more were starved out, and betrayed by a wretch of whom they begged bread; in the case of William and Ellen Crafts, the presentation by the Rev. Theodore Parker of a brace of pistols as a wedding gift, a bridal pair whom Boston was too patriotic to harbor; at Boston a man shot dead by one of his own party preventing the rescue of Burns; at Ripley, Ohio, a pursuer killed by a fugitive; at Cincinnati, Margaret Garner killing her child to save it from the slave catcher; at Sandy Hill, Pennsylvania, a

man and his family beaten insensible with clubs ; in Philadelphia, a woman with her unborn child sent back from the building where the Declaration of Independence was signed ; at Christiana, Pennsylvania, Gorsuch shot arresting his slave ; at Philadelphia, Passmore Williamson imprisoned for offenses growing out of his informing a free woman that she was free. But why go on ? There is no criminal service in Christendom so bloody and barbarous as slave-catching in America ; none so dangerous. This law has drawn a track of blood all over the Northern States ; rioting, popular insurrection, martial law, court-houses in chains—this is the entertainment to which the white citizens of New York are invited ; this is the “service” we owe to our masters on the plantation ; and any attempt to escape from our “service” makes us felons and traitors. Why, the old Hebrew law punished a man-stealer with death, and forbade any one to pursue a fleeing bondman. But we are out of the shade of Judaism ; we are Christians, and so have legislated every American into the alternative of being a brute or a criminal. There is not a week when some family in New York is not called to choose between this dilemma. The North is alive with flying fugitives, and we cannot escape the responsibility of action in respect to them. The Fugitive Slave Law is a statute to enslave the white man, and compel every northern citizen to do a work which every slave-holding gentleman scorns to do otherwise than through a subordinate.

Do you say this penalty is not inflicted ? Have you heard of the Jerry rescue trials ; of the Gorsuch trials ; of the Boston trials ; of the arrest of several citizens of Oberlin, Ohio, among them a professor in a college ; of the imprisonment of an editor in Cincinnati ? Have you read the atrocious charge of Kane and Wilson and Sprague, which would change every Christian of the North into a traitor ? But what if this penalty is never enforced ? Are all the citizens of New York who have, first or last, given a crust of bread and a cup of water to a fugitive slave, to sit down under the imputation of a criminal offense, and live under the shadow of a criminal prosecution ? Is it true that the hundreds of clergymen of the state, the multitudes of the best and noblest men and women of New York, including numbers of defenders of this law ; the hundreds of thousands of benevolent persons—from the hackman who scorns to betray the slave, to the Commissioner or Marshal who gives timely warning to the “chattel’s” friends to get him on the express train of the underground railroad—is it true that all these are simply unconvicted criminals, permitted to go unpunished by the mercy of our rulers ? Why, should

every man and woman of any city in New York, who has committed this crime of helping him who was ready to perish, be arrested and sentenced, there would be a procession from court-room to jail, containing more of the wealth, position, culture, worth and refinement of that town than ever yet walked on any solemn celebration of our nation's great holiday. If all the citizens of New York who have succored the fugitive would appear in an army to be reviewed by our Governor and officers of the commonwealth, I take it there would be no question whether we should longer permit the flower of our state to lie under the imputation of crime for obedience to the common instincts of humanity. In behalf of 3,400,000 white people, enslaved to this miserable alternative by our American despotism, we demand that the State of New York shall throw the protection of her great name alike over white and black men ; since we cannot oppress the humblest negro that flies over our hills, without enslaving the chief magistrate who sits at the head of the commonwealth.

Whence comes the necessity for such a law ? Show us the cause why the people of New York should live under such humiliation as this statute imposes upon us all. What is the great necessity of State which makes it a patriotic duty for freemen to sit down in this valley of abasement ? Is it found in that clause of the Constitution of the United States which provides for the rendition of fugitives from service or labor ? Look at that mildly worded clause and say if it appears like the lair of such a monster as this bloody edict ? Grant (what is still an open question) that under this provision the Congress of the United States has power to enact any law for the return of fugitive slaves ; where is the necessity that one so abhorrent to all the sympathies of good men should be thrust upon us ? This does not read like one of the laws of a Christian Republic, in which a hard necessity is complied with by the scrupulous guarding of all adjacent rights, and liberty protected even while submitting to slavery. No, this reads like the edict of an Oriental Despot, purposely made to insult its subjects ; sparing no feelings, respecting no rights, rudely and wantonly trampling on the noblest sentiments and most sacred hopes of man. And its enforcement is marked by the same results as a tyrant's mandate. Everywhere its officers are despised and hated ; to be mixed up with its operations is a stain on any gentleman's reputation ; to defend it ungowns the most venerable minister of religion ; and its strenuous supporters betray their disgust at the cause in which they are engaged. Does not this point fatally to the origin and purpose of this law ?

We shall never understand this statute till we see that it is one of a series of measures deliberately planned by the Slave Power to break down Liberty in the United States, to oppress the freemen of this Union, to humble and disgrace the Free States of this confederacy, to make freedom contemptible and undermine all reverence for human rights in our distracted country. Maddened by the failure to impress the State of California into the service of despotism; turned away to the hope of establishing slavery in the deserts of Utah and New Mexico, should the people consent; this remorseless power concentrated itself in 1850 for a series of bold aggressions on the constitutional liberties of the American people. And with the pertinacity and ability characteristic of tyranny from the earliest ages it has strode on to that consummation. Every new demand has been coupled with the treasonable threat of violent disunion, involving civil war, and every compliance has but aggravated the lust of dominion that has now reached the height of a towering insanity.

First in this series of aggressive measures was the Fugitive Slave Law. It was drawn up by one of the most able and unscrupulous devotees of the national despotism, pressed upon a reluctant administration, and driven through by the panic cry of dissolution.

The statesmen and people of the North were smitten with the delusion that this was to be the end of agitation, and, as a "finality," granted the demand and legislated themselves into slave catchers for the South. The law was not enacted for the sake of the slaves that might be returned under its provisions, but to make servants of freemen and assert a despotic power hereafter to be exercised. And what a commentary has the history of the last eight years been upon our mistaken compliance with this demand! When we were sufficiently humbled by this edict, our despotism again took the field, and the Missouri Compromise was rent in fragments. Then followed the invasion of Kansas, and for five years that devoted territory has been buffeted by the high winds of tyranny. Heaven and earth have been moved to subjugate this great territory, but, thank God, she is headed the same way as California, Minnesota and Oregon; and no Congress will have shoulders broad enough to bar the door, when she comes, another year, escorted by a majestic retinue of eighteen free states, and thunders for admission to the national household. Next came the Dred Scott decision, which denationalized 5,000,000 of Americans and spread slavery over a million and a half square miles of free

territory, and put forth heresy enough to subvert the Constitution and change the government ; and now comes the clamor for the possession of the purse and sword to carry out a gigantic scheme of subjugation and annexation in behalf of slavery ; and close on the heels of this demand run the propositions to open the African Slave Trade and assert the right of property in man on every foot of American soil.

Every step in this series of measures is the inevitable result of its predecessor ; and if history records any instance where tyranny has gained so many points in eight years, I have not read the page. And there is no halting in this march. This insane despotism must go on by the inexorable logic of events. Mr. Douglas cannot stop it ; Mr. Hammond cannot stop it ; nobody can arrest it by moderate councils. Every man who whispers moderation is counted an enemy. It is the old spectaee of Despotism arrayed against Liberty. This is our form of tyranny. What Pharaoh was to Egypt ; what the Caesars were to Rome ; what the Hapsburgs are to Germany ; what the Stuarts were to England ; that, is slavery to America. We must east it out or it will first subdue and then change us all, and Constitutional Government once more be launched on the untried ocean of new revolution and new experiments.

Such is the condition of affairs in our commonwealth and country ; and we believe it justifies State legislation for the protection of personal liberty. We see no way to avert the dismal overturn of constitutional and national freedom, save through the action of the people in their capacity of sovereign States. By this unjust Fugitive Slave Law, the State of New York is insulted and humiliated in the person of every citizen. We call on the Legislature representing that State to disover some practical way of relief from such oppression. We ask those we have chosen as our agents in making laws to be more solicitous for the preservation of liberty than any other interest. All things in the State rest on the personal liberty of the citizen. Do not tell us you have done anyth ng for the material prosperity of the people until you have repelled this indignity and rescued us from the despotism of this odious statute.

I do not argue the ways and means of doing this ; or prescribe the form of a statute ; or venture to interfere with the vocation of legislators in framing the law. I only would represent the moral reprobation with which the people regard this statute ; their demand for release from its unjust provisions ; their determination to be free from allegiance to it.

There is no longer a question of obedience or disobedience to the Fugitive Slave Law. The people of New York never intended to obey it; never have obeyed it; are now perpetually disobeying it in every way, save the most legitimate and honorable action in their sovereign capacity as a State. The real question at the present juncture is this: *Shall the people of New York lie under the imputation of unconvicted criminals; or shall their sense of this odious law be embodied in a statute, and the commonwealth defend her citizens?* We are now in anarchy; every humane man and woman is compelled to resist and evade a law of the United States, which conflicts with natural justice and republican institutions. We desire to return to the reign of law and order; and since the people do not intend to be oppressed in this way, let them enact their determination into a statute, and pledge the whole power of the State to its enforcement. We demand that every safeguard shall be thrown about the personal liberty of the citizens of New York, which the wisdom of our legislators can devise; that it shall be made an impossibility for any free man to be reduced to slavery on our soil, or forced to aid in subjugating his neighbor to servitude. We only ask that whatever law may be enacted shall be adequate to that end. Give us a practical, unmistakable, decisive statute, and enforce it against the whole world; and from the day when the Empire State takes this position, slavery aggression will cease; the siege of liberty in the Free States will be raised; and our national barbarism will shrink back to its native home, preparatory to its abdication and the inauguration of freedom through the Republic.

